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C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 001009

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BELARUSIAN SOVEREIGNTY NOT UNDER THREAT FROM PUTIN  
VISIT

REF: 06 MINSK 1019

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) With the December 13-14 visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Minsk imminent, official Minsk has moved to tamp down wild rumors in the local and international media about the end of Belarusian sovereignty through the signing of a Union State Constitution. According to a report from ITAR-TASS's Minsk bureau, Aleksandr Lukashenko's press secretary Pavel Lyogkiy expressed surprise at the notion that

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the constitution would be signed during this visit, while the Minsk-based Standing Committee of the Union State said that the constitution was not even on the agenda for the upcoming meetings.

Comment

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¶2. (C) We do not believe Belarus' sovereignty is under threat. It is possible that some mutual agreements will result, but the end of Belarusian statehood is not inherent in that. As before, Lukashenko has little interest in any concrete steps that would limit his power in Belarus and relegate him to second-tier (or lower) status in a Union State. He has even less interest in concluding such an agreement with a much stronger interlocutor like Vladimir Putin (reftel). If, as some reports contend, the original rumors of the signing came from Minsk, it is likely part of Lukashenko's efforts to impress a captive domestic audience with his manliness in defending Belarus, and continue his geopolitical gamesmanship abroad -- where gestures toward Russia are intended to frighten Europe into concessions. (Note: At a meeting with EU Heads of Mission December 11, Latvian Ambassador Mora expressed sympathy for such a position. End note.) We must continue engagement with EU partners to ensure that cheap concessions do not result. At the same time, there is no question that official Minsk is deeply unhappy about the selection of First Deputy Prime Minister (and Gazprom chairman) Dmitriy Medvedev as a Russian presidential candidate: Lukashenko and his cronies know that they have no chance of regaining Moscow's previous subsidies should Medvedev succeed Putin.  
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